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Ready or Not: Planning for an Emergency

UC ANR emergency information and resources—before, during, and after



Why make an emergency plan?

Natural disasters like fires, floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, and volcanic eruptions may strike without warning, leaving you confined to your home or workplace or separated from your family. You may also need to evacuate from home or work.

Other catastrophes, such as heat waves, drought, water shortages, air pollution, food shortages, and highly transmittable infectious diseases, are also disruptive and life threatening.

Be ready for any impending emergency! Prepare an action plan to help reduce stress and fear and build the confidence to survive during and after the disaster.

Step 1. Hold a family meeting

When you develop your emergency plan, involve everyone in your household in the process. Talk together about your plan in detail—whether

you write it out or create one in an online app—using the following guidelines:

- Set aside a time with the members of your household to discuss an emergency plan.
- Talk about the types of disasters that might occur in your area and the need to prepare for any emergency or disaster.
- Discuss dangers associated with specific types of disasters, such as fire, earthquake, flood, environmental toxins, transmittable diseases, and any other crises that interrupt normal life activities. Discuss the impact of disasters on life, health, food access, and family or household survival. Think of the needs of everyone in your family or household (including pets) and those in your communication networks.

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Did you know?

You should practice your action plan. Make sure every family member is familiar with all aspects of the action plan. Practice your plan several times throughout the year and revise it if necessary to make sure it is effective.

Step 2. Develop an action plan

Your action plan should include the following information:

Two emergency meeting places for your family

- one meeting place outside your home but on the premises, to use if there is a sudden emergency like a fire or earthquake
- another meeting place outside your neighborhood, in case you cannot reach your home

Two telephone contacts

- one local contact for all family members to call if they are away from home
- another out-of-state contact who can contact concerned relatives and friends in other areas of the state and country and provide updates

The evacuation plan

- Decide what to do in case your family must evacuate from your home, who should leave the home first, and who will be responsible for completing each activity during the evacuation

- Plan which possessions you should take, if time allows, and what to leave behind

Plan for your pets

- Plan how to care for any pets during and after the emergency
- Decide who will find the pets, what to do with them, and what to do if they are injured

(See Step 7: Nine evacuation priorities.)

Essential emergency supplies:

- Include a first aid kit, sanitizers, wipes, and special medications for family members.
- Pack an extra pair of glasses for those who wear glasses. An old pair works well.
- Do not forget sanitary supplies.
- Include a portable radio.
- Include cash, credit cards, and extra car keys.
- Pack chargers for mobile devices.
- For each family member, pack a blanket or sleeping bag, change of underwear, clothing such as sweats, a hat, warm socks, and shoes.

Food and water needed:

- Each person needs 1 gallon of water per day and foods that are simple to prepare and ready to eat.
- Choose foods high in energy that store well: dried meats, canned fish and meats, canned or powdered juices, dried soups, canned beans, canned and/or powdered milk, peanut butter, crackers, granola bars, nuts, and dried fruit.
- Pack a can opener and plastic or paper ware.
- Include individually packaged snack foods that are safe to carry in pockets and purses and easy to access by adults and children.
- Remember food, water, medications, and maybe a toy for your pet!

(See Issue 3: Food and Water)

Step 3. Prepare an emergency kit

Prepare an emergency kit with the necessary food, water, and equipment to help your family survive until help arrives or until critical services are restored. You can organize the supply kit yourself or

purchase one from local merchants, surplus supply stores, and some Red Cross offices.

Emergency kit

Unless you live in an isolated area, plan to store enough supplies for you and your family members for at least 3 days. Usually 3 days is the most time one needs to get through a disaster until help arrives. However, if space and resources allow, 1 to 3 weeks of supplies would be ideal.

The items suggested for the kit are inexpensive to purchase. In many cases, they are already available around the home.

Store supplies in containers strong enough for transport; backpacks, canvas bags, sturdy plastic storage containers, and plastic garbage cans work well. Store your supplies in a dry, cool, accessible place where everyone knows the emergency supply kit is stored and where it is easy to reach.

Schedule regular times throughout the year to replace the food and water in the kit. Replace food and water after 6 months or by the expiration dates on the packages.

Each family member may make a personal emergency kit to carry in the car, keep under a desk, or keep in other places of work or play.

Simple but useful items to include

Pack canned fuel or portable burners to heat food or water in a metal container. Include a whistle to help rescuers find you in case you become trapped somewhere. Carry a flashlight with extra batteries packed separately. Make sure to include matches or a lighter.

Use plastic bags to carry things or to wear on hands and feet for warmth. A large plastic bag can be used as a windbreaker, raincoat, or sleeping bag.

The items listed above easily fit into a clean, half-gallon milk or juice carton. This can form a personal emergency kit, which can be stored under the bed, in a desk or drawer, or in the trunk of a car.

Step 4. **Home hazard hunt to prevent injury**

Examine your home for hazards! When a natural or other disaster strikes, ordinary objects in your home may cause injury or damage. Anything that can move, fall, break, or cause a fire is a potential hazard. Use this list to locate/find home hazards:

- Check chimneys, roofs, walls, and foundations for stability.
- Seek professional advice from a trusted source, such as a structural engineer, on how to make sure your home is bolted securely to the foundation.
- Secure your water heater and appliances to prevent movement and rupture of the utility lines.
- Keep breakables and heavy objects on bottom shelves.
- Secure heavy, tall furniture such as bookcases, china cabinets, or wall units to prevent them from toppling over.
- Secure hanging plants and heavy picture frames or mirrors—especially items hanging over beds.
- Put latches on cabinet doors to keep them closed during shaking.
- Keep flammable or hazardous liquids in secured cabinets or on lower shelves.

(See Issue 2: Safety Considerations.)

Step 5. **Organize a self-help network**

Self-help networks are groups of people who agree or arrange to assist individuals with disabilities in an emergency. If you have a relative, friend, neighbor, or coworker who has a disability, discuss what assistance that person may need during an emergency.

Urge people with disabilities to make and keep an emergency supply kit. Ask them for a copy of, or help them compile, a list of their special items such as medicines, special equipment, food, personal need items, and other considerations such as physical assistance.

Talk with people with disabilities about the best way to inform them of an unexpected or an oncoming disaster. If advisable, keep a key to the person's house so you can quickly provide assistance.

Refer to your local emergency services office for more information about local networks that may assist an individual with a disability to register for emergency alerts.



Step 6. Emergency preparedness list

Check off each emergency preparedness task when it is completed.

- Make your emergency kit and keep it in an easy-to-reach place where everyone has access to it.
- Keep phone numbers for the police, ambulance service, and fire department in your phone and by each landline.
- Install smoke and carbon monoxide detectors on each level of the house and in all bedrooms.
- Keep a portable radio and batteries in your kit and near each bed.
- Find two emergency exits out of each room.
- Find a safe spot in or outside of your home for the family to gather for each type of disaster.
- Check to be sure you have adequate insurance.
- Take a CPR and a first aid course.
- Keep a flashlight and shoes near each bed.

What to replace

- Change smoke and carbon monoxide detector batteries once a year if indicated. Some smoke detectors require a 9-volt battery that needs to be replaced regularly, and some smoke detectors have a nonreplaceable battery that lasts 10 years.
- Recharge or replace your fire extinguisher according to the manufacturer's directions.
- Refresh emergency food, water, and medications (if necessary) every 6 months.

What to teach

- Train children how and when to call 911 for help.
- Train family members on how and when to turn off power, gas, and water at main switches.
- Train family members on how to use a fire extinguisher and where it is located in the home.

What to practice

- Review and practice your emergency action plan throughout the year to make sure all family members are familiar with the plan. Look for ways to revise and improve your plan.

Step 7. Nine evacuation priorities

During a disaster, your family may need to evacuate your home. An evacuation plan will help you make difficult decisions and move out quickly!

If you must evacuate suddenly, **the Nine Ps** can help you remember what to take and where to go!

People. Make sure all family members know the family evacuation plan and, if separated, know where they have agreed to meet away from the disaster area.

Pets. Your evacuation plan should include how to care for pets and livestock if needed. Take pets with you or, if time allows, move pets to a safe area. In an emergency such as a fire or flood, open pens and set animals free—they can usually take care of themselves if they are free to move about.

Prescriptions. Take with you any prescription medications, eyeglasses, dentures, medical devices, and special medical needs for family members.

Pictures. Take along family albums and pictures, or make sure all digital pictures are backed up to an external storage service. Include pictures of the interior and exterior of your home, furniture, jewelry, sports equipment, autos, and so on for insurance purposes. Family pictures cannot be replaced.

Phone numbers. Take along the family phone directory or back up electronically. It usually contains important telephone numbers and addresses you will need. Bring external cell phone chargers—you may not have electricity.

Papers and documents. Take along, or back up electronically, important papers like your will, birth certificates, passports, medical and insurance records,

military discharge papers, bank records, and investment and tax records.

(See Issue 5: Finances and Insurance)

Packets of food. Take your food, water, and supply kit. If time and space allow, pack additional food.

Plenty of cash! Take all the cash you can, credit and debit cards, and any expensive jewelry with you.

Place to relocate. Make sure your evacuation plan includes a place to relocate and plans for safe travel routes. Keep appropriate maps in the car and in your emergency kit in case the cell networks go down and electronic versions are not available.

For more information

Your county UC Cooperative Extension office may be able to advise you on preparing for emergencies. Remember that being prepared will help speed up the evacuation, return, and recovery process.

A checklist to build a basic emergency kit can be found here: ready.gov/sites/default/files/2020-03/ready_emergency-supply-kit-checklist.pdf.

Phone apps

- hsdl.org/c/the-national-library-of-medicine-disaster-information-management-research-center-disaster-apps-and-mobile-web-pages/

Local sources of emergency information

- county and city emergency preparedness
- local Red Cross

About this publication

The Ready or Not Emergency Preparedness Newsletter Series is a resource for individuals and families. Each newsletter addresses a specific topic on how to prepare for a disaster. The series includes the following issues: 1: Planning for an Emergency; 2: Safety Considerations; 3: Food and Water; 4: Emergency Considerations for Children and Families; 5: Finances and Insurance; and 6: Time to Clean Up.

For more information about this publication, visit ucanr.edu/sites/CNH/.

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